Developing a Community Technology Strategic Plan

Louis G. Tornatzky, Ph.D.

Southern Technology Council

Battelle Memorial Institute

Vicksburg, MS - January 26, 2001

Benefits of a Community Tech Strategy

- Steers K-18
- Essential to attracting or retaining high value-added industry
- Needed to prevent brain drain
- New Economy success linked to a higher quality of life
- Higher wage jobs and more disposable income

Why a WRITTEN Plan?

- Can be upgraded
- Accessible
- Focuses and motivates action
- Promotes community learning
- Can be held up and pointed to in large meetings

Ineffectual Strategic Plans

- Ones devoid of economic and organizational analysis
- Impossible dreams, puffery
- Without action maps
- Born from a non-participative process
- Stealth plans (e.g., invisible)

Steps and Elements of a Plan

- An assessment of the economic "as is"
- S.W.O.T
- Vision
- Strategies
- Necessary actions
- Budgets and implementation

Typical Substantive Foci

- Workforce
- R&D
- Entrepreneurial infrastructure
- Technology commercialization
- Capital
- Public policies
- Tech Infrastructure (e.g., Internet access)

The Community Assessment

- Use secondary data to describe traditional economy, and emerging tech economy
- Include "non-economic" indicators (e.g., human resources)
- Benchmarking is informative and motivating
- Cluster analysis focused on tech sector
- Qualitative interviews an essential element
- Adapt TeamDelta tools

S.W.O.T.

- *Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats*
- **Captures in a 4-6 page prose summary what is, and what is possible (or not)**
- **Draws from more extensive and quantitative community assessment**
- **Leads naturally to subsequent strategies**
- **A very useful instructional tool**

Articulating Strategies

- A creative, judgmental process
- What are the 4-6 best bets for moving the community forward?
- Should include both long-term and shorter term strategies.
- Might involve exploiting a competitive strength, fixing a fatal weakness, or investing in a short-lived opportunity

Strategies (cont.)

- Should present the analytic rationale for why this particular strategy should be pursued

- May describe experience of other communities who pursued a comparable strategy

- A strategy (e.g., making State U. super) will subsume several more specific actions

- Will preferably target certain traded sectors and industries

Recommended Actions

- Should be "actionable"
- Should describe specific activities, events, or programs that will help to accomplish a Strategic goal
- Useful to describe by example - "best practices" benchmarking
- Will describe what objectives will be accomplished if implemented

Implementation Preview for Recommended Actions

- Identify time frame (e.g., near term/long term)
- Identify lead responsible organization(s) and key partner organizations
- Specify resources ($) needed, whether one-time or continuous support, and likely sources
- Identify milestones and products

Planning Participants

- A lead organization should manage the planning process from start to finish - up to actual implementation

- Lead organization can be community-based or external paid consulting entity

- Planning Committee should be multi-sector in its composition, with a particular tilt toward technology-oriented organizations

Planning Processes

- Small (4-6) steering group plus much larger number of intermittent participants (30-50)

- Break down planning into tasks, with different people providing task leadership

- Short (1 hour maximum), frequent (at least every 2 weeks) meetings, with a written agenda.

- Meeting discussions, decisions and "to-do" items should be captured in brief, and circulated within 24 hours

Planning Processes (cont.)

- **Interim products (e.g., draft reports) should be widely circulated among committee, and suggestions for changes addressed**

- **Major products should be exposed to public discussion and feedback**

- **Planning team should strive to have all products visibly "owned" by community power elite, public and private**

The Strategic Plan report

- Should include a concise Executive Summary
- Up to 100-150 pages
- Should include attractive, easily-understood graphics
- Packaged with a short press release
- Introduced by most politically important community leaders - public and private

After the Plan: Needed Implementation Details for Each Action

- **First annual budget, organized by expense categories**

- **Position descriptions and responsibilities**

- **Organizational structure**

- **Start-up tasks, organized by quarter, with assigned responsibilities and milestones**

- **What actually happens**

After the Plan: Implementation Strategy Issues

- **Which actions should be implemented and in what order?**

- **Mix of actions: some with likely short-term impacts; others long-term payoff**

- **How do we maintain the vision and enthusiasm?**

- **When do we revisit or renew the Plan?**

Leadership and Implementation

- **Plans are not self-implementing**
- **Few communities or states have successfully implemented a technology strategy without a small number of people with "fire in the belly" to lead the charge**
- **Can come from any sector or station**
- **Will likely emerge during the planning process**
- **Can be legitimated with position or title**